

## Context for our new tailgating policy

*President Ronald D. Liebowitz, Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of the College Shirley Collado, and Director of Athletics Erin Quinn sent the following memo to the Middlebury community on September 23, 2014.*

Dear Students, Faculty, and Staff,

We are writing to provide additional context for Middlebury's recent decision to implement a dry tailgating policy that prohibits alcohol in the tailgating area before and after home football games. It is clear that some preparatory communications would have served everyone, including us, well, and so we apologize for what came as a surprise to many. Let us provide that context here.

Our change in tailgating policy was not an isolated action. Rather, the new policy is the culmination of several years of growing concern regarding alcohol abuse on campus, diminishing standards of behavior at tailgating events, the inconsistency of allowing alcohol at one event—football games—but at no others (soccer, field hockey, and cross country), and the incompatibility between our athletics program's mission and philosophy on the one hand, and what was transpiring at a major athletics venue on the other.

Middlebury's first priority, above all others, is the health and safety of our students. Over the last several years, the College has instituted a number of policies and educational programs designed to reduce irresponsible alcohol consumption, particularly of hard alcohol. Part of this strategy has been to provide students with venues and opportunities to socialize and attend parties. Contrary to a popular narrative on campus, the College has worked hard with the Vermont liquor inspector and state law enforcement to expand the number of legal places to have parties and still remain within Vermont's strict state laws governing alcohol use and policing.

No matter how much we wish otherwise, the consumption of alcohol by persons under the age of 21 is illegal. No area on our campus is "protected" space, even though Middlebury is a private institution. We have worked with the Town of Middlebury to develop a healthy relationship with the Middlebury Police Department and to reduce the presence of officers on campus while providing opportunities to enjoy college life, responsibly. But this arrangement requires the ongoing cooperation of the community in maintaining responsible, high standards of behavior and in self-policing itself. Too often our community has fallen short in both respects. Despite rules to the contrary, the tailgate area has on occasion become the site of an unruly, alcohol-fueled party with little connection to the football game. Faced with the choice of banning alcohol or establishing a full police presence in the tailgate area, we opted for the former. In a small rural town such as ours, policing the College's tailgate gatherings would pose an unreasonable burden on the local police department, it would counter our goal of having a smaller law enforcement presence on campus, emergencies notwithstanding, and it would result in the likelihood of the arrest of some of our students, alumni, or parents. None of these outcomes would be productive for anyone or reflect well on the College or members of the extended College community.

The dry tailgating policy is rooted in our strong desire to create a safe, responsible, and welcoming environment for fans who wish to enjoy their tailgating experience and the game. At the suggestion of several football families, we have increased the hours of dry tailgating to allow more time to cook before the game, socialize, and meet up with players for a post-game gathering.

In retrospect, we should have communicated the change in policy earlier and more broadly, providing a context that would explain the reasons for the change. The change in policy was discussed on campus at a Community Council meeting in March and was the subject of discussions across several administrative departments over the last year. But again, we should have done more, including working more closely with students in the articulation of the policy. Ultimately, however, decisions affecting the safety and standards of our community, as well as institutional risk, must be the responsibility of the senior administration.

We should note that, in addition to those who have contacted us with concern and even anger over the new dry tailgating policy, we have received many emails, calls, and in-person messages of support for our decision. We believe it was the correct course of action for Middlebury.

Sincerely,

Ron Liebowitz, President

Shirley M. Collado, Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of the College

Erin Quinn, Director of Athletics

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